Gophers, Ghosts, and Electronic Dreams: A Feminist Critique of New Literary Forms

Jennifer Sue Boyers

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GOPHERS, GHOSTS, AND ELECTRONIC DREAMS: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF NEW LITERARY FORMS

by

Jennifer Sue Boyers

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
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First of all, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Gerald Markle. Without his help, his encouragement, and his hard work, I would not be where I am today.

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Jennifer Sue Boyers
GOPHERS, GHOSTS, AND ELECTRONIC DREAMS: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF NEW LITERARY FORMS

Jennifer Sue Boyers, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1995

New literary forms was used as a method to show that women writers construct notions of objectivity, subjectivity, reflexivity and privilege fundamentally different than do males who are writing new literary forms. A narrative new literary form construct was employed and epistemological issues were explored in a self-referentially reflexive way.

The history and epistemological assumptions of new literary forms was explored in order to provide a context for the study. The feminist critique examined the use of autobiography in sociological writing, looked at women writers in the area of science studies, and explored essentialist and non-essentialist feminist epistemologies.

It was found that male new literary forms writers do indeed employ masculine, positivistic epistemological constructions, though they claim the contrary. The author offers an alternative feminist recipe to androcentric epistemological constructions of subjects, objects and reflexivity.
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CHAPTER I

FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS

She Doth Not Sleep: October, 1994

My head begins its sleepy descent onto my chest as unfocusing eyes flap slowly open and shut. Such is the life of Ginny Wolf, sociology graduate student. I stubbornly shake myself awake and put down the article I've been studying--"Discourse, rhetoric, reflexivity: Seven days in the library" (Ashmore, Myers, & Potter, 1995)--and head into the kitchen to make myself a mug of instant coffee. Many "real" coffee drinkers, my parents for example, would call my quickly prepared concoction "fake"--a good example of the instant gratification attitude that seems to permeate our consumer society, and my generation in particular. The debate is not really about real versus fake; it is about form versus substance.

Lately I've been staying up quite late at night in order to work on my master's thesis. I hope to graduate in the spring of 1995. The process of researching new literary forms has been one of discovery and frustration; a love-hate relationship that both begins and ends with
the very same article I find myself reviewing tonight. When I first came to Western Michigan University, my advisor read some samples of my writing. As an undergraduate, I found traditional modes of writing academic papers restrictive and somewhat boring. So I began to present my empirical research papers in the form of humorous narratives. For example, after seeing Michael Moore's documentary film Roger & me (1989), I contrasted the sociology of Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx by bringing them both into the 1990s and making them assembly line comrades in the Flint General Motors plant.

My adventures with experimental forms and humor have become sort of a trademark of mine. However, being exposed to the more rigorous circles of graduate study in sociology taught me a very important lesson: what I thought had been a creative and highly original idea on my part—presenting sociology in forms that opposed traditional modes of scientific writing—was really an uninformed venture into a subfield of sociology known as new literary forms.¹ No one was more surprised than I to discover that my writing was actually grounded in a specific historical context and tradition. It was then that I began investigating new literary forms in order to better understand my own writing. Since my first formal encounter with a new literary forms text, the subject has
developed into the focal point of my master’s thesis. I still can recall the day I read that first article by Ashmore et al. (1995).

Women Drivers Spotted on the Information Superhighway: January, 1994

I leave my mentor’s office with an 800 page volume—Handbook of science and technology studies (Jasanoff, Markle, Petersen, & Pinch, 1995)—that could easily serve as an effective doorstop, or perhaps as a murder weapon in an old Hitchcock film. Prior to the book’s publication, my mentor—who also happens to be one of the book’s editors—has complained about the editorial process for the last six months. It seems to me that process should be the important element in scholarship, not the finished product. He also tells me that several professional and personal relationships broke up during the course of producing the text. It sounds more like a boxing match to me than a cooperative, scholarly endeavor. When I commented on this to him, my mentor told me (using masculine imagery) that in "real" scholarship one has to deal with blood and guts.

I sigh with despair. As if I didn’t already have enough things to do today, now I have to go to the library to copy an article on discourse analysis from the handbook (Jasanoff et al., 1995). My advisor wants me to
become familiar with the new literary forms literature, and the Ashmore et al. (1995) article contained in the handbook is an exemplary piece. I understand that discourse analysts treat scientific texts as if they were literary texts—entities in and of themselves (Ashmore, 1989, p. 46)—but I don’t understand the connection with new literary forms.

I can already tell this is going to be a hellish day! The winter sky looms gray and dreary as I pass below the clock tower that is a part of Waldo Library. With its tile facade, that strange timepiece reminds me of a hard, cold bathroom floor—the kind of floor that freezes your feet in the morning after a long night of slumber in a warm, comfortable bed. I find myself wondering: what is the purpose of form if it conjures unappealing images? I pass a young woman sitting on a bench outside of the library, warming her hands with a steaming cup of coffee. As the aroma hits my nostrils, I wonder if she is drinking the real or the fake variety. I head into the library and up to a secluded table on the second floor to read the Ashmore et al. (1995) article. I think to myself that I could spend seven days in Waldo Library just reading this handbook (Jasanoff et al., 1995). I take my seat and decide to browse through the book before I begin reading. Some of the articles look
interesting, but overall, the titles lead me to believe most of them are probably boring. A small yawn escapes from my mouth, as I settle down to read the Ashmore et al. (1995) article. At least their title is creative and holds the promise of an interesting piece of work.

An hour later I finish the last words of the article, my eyes riveted to the page--my first reading of a new literary form. In fact, one could even say the authors employed a new literary form to describe new literary forms. The authors, all British and all male, take on the "Other" as subject and create a female student working on her dissertation. This nameless woman conducts her literature review over the course of seven days spent in the library, and records her thoughts and findings in a diary; this diary provides the text of the article. I ponder a moment to consider the significance of a diary as an exclusively women's forum.

The fact that the woman is not given a name in the article really bothers me. However, upon reflection, I realize that I should not be so surprised by her namelessness. It is a cultural norm in this country for women to be nameless, or to take a man's name in marriage, which is the same thing. Women lose their names every day when they enter into a traditional Western marriage--Nancy Ellis Traphagen becomes Mrs. Dale Boyers.
with the mere giving of a ring and the recitation of vows. In the Bible we read of "Lot's wife" and "Noah's wife"--nameless women (Lagerwey, 1994). Since we base our society on patrilineal descent, I guess it follows that a woman could be represented as nameless. So, in a sense, the nameless woman of the article is a very real character; she is a woman who lacks a very basic source of identity--her own name. I scratch my chin and ponder this thought. Trying to recall a text I've read that contained nameless male characters, I realize I can think of none.

On the other hand, the nameless woman is an entirely fictional creation, as she is also stripped of any physical descriptors. She is faceless and without a body. Where are the big, pendulous breasts; the creamy, white thighs? I would argue that the authors' choice to create a bodiless woman is very unusual, especially in this day and age, where women's bodies are constantly objectified.

I begin to dwell on the issue of names and cannot envision myself ever giving up my name in a marriage. The thought of a traditional wedding ceremony conjures such horrid images for me that I decide to take a break. I leave my things at the table and begin walking around the library. I find myself down on the first floor by the on-line computer search systems. Deep in thought, I
don't notice the strange beeping sound at first. Eventually I become aware of the annoying tone emanating from one of the computer modules. I trace the sound to its source and quickly sit down in front of the monitor to see if I can stop the noise. Much to my chagrin, the blank screen suddenly falls silent and a strange message appears followed by an equally strange drawing:

TO: X93WOLF@WMICH.EDU
FROM: GEEZER@KZOO.NLF
DATE: January 17, 1994
RE: New Literary Forms

EMAIL> "Beware of theories that naively assume the truth of your own knowledge and the falsehood of everyone else's . . . . Ignore theories of knowledge that do not give proper explanation of why we believe, but merely explain it away" (Dean, 1978, p. 287). Sincerely, Professor Geezer (Ashmore, 1989, p. 15).

I am struck by the strangeness of the letters and symbols that serve as our addresses. Perhaps that is part of my disdain for using electronic mail. I consider e-mail to be the quintessential new literary form: pure substance without concrete form. It is a disembodied jumble of neat, typeset letters. Where is the original script of each individual author? Where is the personal quality of the stationary, the colorful paper, the unique signature of the author? Where is the humanity? Who the hell sent me this message? Several thoughts and questions race through my mind as I study the very ambiguous
message and the interesting drawing that were meant for me to see.

The drawing is of two hands; a real hand draws a picture of a hand, which looks exactly like the real hand doing the sketch. As I look closer, it strikes me that the hands depicted in the drawing are undoubtedly male hands. Since this is a visual display of reflexivity, am I to glean some sort of message concerning masculinity and reflexive practice? I'm not sure. I do not understand. I do not know anyone named "Professor Geezer."

I am not very familiar with e-mail. I like to refer to myself as "lost-despite-a-map on the information superhighway." I can read most of the signs, but I just cannot seem to get to where I want to go. I am competent enough to learn to use technology, in fact, I am very skilled with a computer. However, my reasons for shunning many forms of technology have more to do with principles than practice. For example, I have purposely refused to use e-mail, as I find it very impersonal and mechanical. I don't even like to type letters to people, let alone send them over invisible airwaves. Whatever happened to pen and paper? What about the good old card catalog, which allowed one to actually touch concrete information?
I continue to read and re-read the message—the context of the meaning escapes me. The drawing is fascinating, though I find it to be thoroughly masculine in its imagery. Someone is attempting to give me some information relating to new literary forms, but I don’t quite see the connection. But how would anyone know I was here, at this particular terminal, at this specific time?

The obnoxious beeping sound begins anew. Perhaps it is Professor Geezer again, with some more information on new literary forms! I eagerly direct my attention to the computer screen. Sure enough, another message appears on the terminal:

TO: X93WOLF@WMICH.EDU
FROM: GEEZER@KZOO.NLF
DATE: January 17, 1994
RE: Acquisition of Ashmore Text

EMAIL> I know you are researching new literary forms for a possible master’s thesis. I have taken the liberty of sending you the seminal text written on new literary forms, as it is very difficult to find in the United States. Ginny, a copy of The reflexive thesis (Ashmore, 1989) is enroute to your apartment, via UPS. I hope that this text will provide you with sufficient information to allow you to begin your quest into the wonderful world of new literary forms. And, being the feminist you are, I’m sure you’ll find some relevant connections. Good luck! I will be in touch again soon.
Professor G.
New Literary Forms Revealed

The book came the next day via United Parcel Service--this mode of communication I do understand. I eagerly bury myself in the text and begin wildly marking notes to myself in the margins. Malcolm Ashmore is a sociologist. I find the reading to be very enjoyable and fascinating. I notice that Professor Geezer has left me a list of call numbers to go with each section of the book. Am I to look these up as supplemental texts? It seems very strange and spooky to me that a complete stranger is sending me semiotic signs, not to mention the fact that he somehow knew exactly where I was when the e-mail messages were sent. I pause in my reading a moment to further ponder this mystery, but after glancing at the clock I discover I have been reading and note-taking for almost three hours, and I am famished! I wander into the kitchen, but not before closing my bedroom drapes and rechecking the dead bolt on my front door. A woman can’t be too careful these days. I have a poem up on my refrigerator, given to me by a woman friend, that equates privilege with being able to go out at night and not fear being raped by men. Danger lurks outside, because with the liberation of the feminist movement comes the violent male backlash. Plus, this strange situation with the unknown Professor Geezer has made me extra cautious.
What I really want is a big, fat, juicy burger from McDonald's; what I prepare is a fat-free, vegetarian burger with artificial meat flavoring from my freezer--another tasteless alternative form. Why do I eat things like this? I place a hand over my somewhat flat stomach and imagine myself twenty years from now with a roll of flab in its place, created primarily from the high fat content of McDonald's hamburgers--the "McDonaldization of Society" (Ritzer, 1993). I scan the vegetarian burger package for its fat content--one patty, 2% fat--and decide that I have made the smart choice. But I do not enjoy the meal, as I am thinking the whole time that women do not feel comfortable with their bodies because men also control the imagery that dictates the standards of feminine beauty. My mind again drifts back to the male hands... where are the big, pendulous breasts; the creamy, white thighs?

After my meal I take a brisk walk outside to clear my head of all the conflicting and disturbing thoughts running rampant. But I am not alone; I bring with me my pepper spray and my body alarm to be prepared for the backlash. The sky is still colorless, but the sun is attempting to peak through the gloom and I am content with this.
I return to my apartment and throw myself back onto my bed to continue with my reading—I make a mental note to someday buy myself a desk. I take a moment to reflect on the fact that I do all of my studying (and eating) on my bed. Would a man study while lounging on his bed? If he did, would he admit it to people? I think not. Somehow the image of the scholarly male researching his thesis while reclining back upon two fluffy pillows does not seem probable within the field of positivistic science as we know it today.

I spend the next week reading and compiling notes, both at my apartment and in the library. I research the call numbers—which were indeed supplementary information to the Ashmore (1989) text—and regularly check the same computer at which I received my initial e-mail messages. Strangely enough the Professor sends me no further information. Reflecting on my work after the seventh day of researching, I come to see that the fictional woman from the discourse analysis article (Ashmore et al., 1995) and I have one important thing in common—we both spend seven days in the library, as directed by unknown, unseen male authors. Even God was allowed one day of rest!

I understand now how discourse analysis is tied to new literary forms, and how both of these "programmes" (programme being a British synonym for methodology) come
out of sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) work (Ashmore, 1989, p. 46). I rather like this field of study and its corresponding tenets. Both new literary forms and discourse analysis have their origins in British SSK research from the early 1970s (Ashmore 1989, p. 3). Sociology of scientific knowledge was concerned with deconstructing the terminology of the scientific method. For example, SSK practitioners questioned terms such as: discovery, proof, replication, problem, fact, observation, and application (Ashmore 1989, p. 13). Practitioners of SSK believed that the natural sciences, as well as the social sciences, could be deconstructed, as they both generate socially constructed knowledge (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988, p. 1). As Ashmore so eloquently puts it: "even the most esoteric features of scientific and mathematical knowledge can be understood as social constructs. . . . No kind of knowledge need be exempt from critical scrutiny" (Ashmore 1989, p. xvii). Though practitioners of SSK do not seek to answer the "One Big Question" in sociology--"Can and/or should the social sciences be like the natural sciences" (Ashmore 1989, p. 7)--they do strive to present a different (some would say critical) picture of the natural sciences and the methods used by its followers (Ashmore 1989, p. 7). This process is
frightening to some social scientists, as well as to many members of SSK (Trigg, 1978, p. 291):

At first sight, the admission that sociological explanations are probably only the product of the social milieu of those putting them forward undermines their authority. Why should anyone in those circumstances pay any more attention to sociologists than, say, witch doctors?

For the most part, mainstream sociology has neither recognized nor supported the subdiscipline of SSK. I am surprised to learn that many of the early SSK practitioners were not sociologists, but not surprised to find that they were (and still are) all men (Ashmore, 1989, pp. 16-25). According to Ashmore (1989), included among SSK practitioners were physicists, mathematicians, philosophers, astronomers, psychologists, and anthropologists (p. 11). Just as SSK became a multi-disciplinary endeavor, it also spread out of Britain into France, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and the United States\(^3\) (Ashmore 1989, p. 11).

Perhaps the biggest issue in SSK—and by association, new literary forms—is that of reflexivity, or "the willingness to probe beyond that level of straightforward interpretation" (Woolgar, 1988a, p. 14). Now I totally understand the relevance of the drawing the Professor sent me on that first day! Is the advocacy of reflexivity in the social sciences desirable? Ashmore's book is an exploration of how different SSK practitioners
conceive of and practically manage reflexivity in their own work (Ashmore, 1989, p. xxiii). I understand now that writing new literary forms is one very creative strategy for dealing with, and advocating, reflexivity in the social sciences. More specifically, new literary forms operates as a method to allow writers to actively incorporate reflexivity into their social science work. According to Ashmore (1989, p. 83), the "advocacy of new literary forms as an essential aid to an authentic reflexive practice" is an effective way to integrate reflexive practices into social science writing. The issue of reflexivity is also an inherent component to discourse analytic work. Some analysts are even working with analyzing discourse analysts' discourse (Ashmore, 1989, chap. 5). As shown in the Ashmore et al. (1995) article, discourse analysts also find new literary forms to be a very attractive method for incorporating reflexivity into their writing.

The backbone of the new literary forms movement is the belief that the "format of the standard empiricist research report inhibits the development of any serious and sustainable reflexive practice . . . therefore other alternative formats are to be preferred" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 66). Among the various experimental genres that have been used are: plays, limericks, parodies, parables,
dialogues, anti-prefaces, anti-introductions, parallel texts, lectures, press reports, and self-engulfing photos (Ashmore 1989, p. 66). (For one of my favorite new literary forms tools, and an example of its use, see the Endnotes section. 4)

I am absolutely intrigued by the possibilities of this alternative method. However, after much research and reading on the topic, I am perplexed by the absence of women authors and women's perspectives in the new literary forms literature--Professor Geezer was right. After re-reading the Ashmore et al. (1995) article, proud and observant feminist that I am, I realize that I am still extremely bothered by Ashmore et al.'s (1995) use of the nameless woman in their article. If one replaces her with a male character, the entire diary format falls apart; the new literary form is rendered ineffective. The authors explain on page 323 that the character "need[s] to be gendered," and I agree. One should not necessarily aim for gender neutrality or androgyny in writing, i.e., to effortlessly replace "her" for "him" and have it retain the same meaning. However, I feel that these male authors stereotyped much of the woman's character and, in the process, caused the text to read in a very cutesy and negatively gendered way. I am not sure how all of these gender issues interact. However, I
decide definitely, on that very day, to do a feminist critique of the new literary forms movement.

She Sleeps: October, 1994

I end my reminiscence of the origins of my present thesis, which is indeed a feminist critique of new literary forms, by placing the Ashmore et al. (1995) article on the nightstand beside my bed. Again I have stayed up much too late. I stumble into the kitchen to rinse out my coffee cup before I brush my teeth for bed. I set the alarm for 6:30 a.m. and turn out the light. I have trouble relaxing my mind for sleep. I look at the clock every thirty minutes: 1:20, 1:52, 2:20. I toss and turn. It seems I will never get to sleep.

I am driving down the Information Superhighway, also known as U.S. 101, in the middle of the night. Blackness seems to envelope the car. I become aware that there are other people in the car with me--two women. I instinctively know that the person beside me in the passenger seat is my foresister--Virginia Woolf. I have always fancied that my father's name is a derivative of Woolf, and that Virginia is truly a blood relative. She is a comforting presence, though I cannot clearly see her face, only a shadow. There is a younger woman in the backseat; I look in the rearview mirror and cannot seem
to find her, yet I know she is there. It is comforting
to have women in my presence.

I ask aloud: "Hey you! In the backseat! Who are
you?" I can see some movement in the mirror, but no
definite human form emerges from the darkness. She
quietly replies: "I am a woman; I am nameless. I am a
fictional character from your readings. Please take me
to the library."

We drive in silence for a few moments as I prepare
to take the proper exit leading to the Western Michigan
University Library. Suddenly a chilled hand covers mine;
it is Virginia's. She forcefully deters me from taking
the exit as she brusquely says: "She has already spent
seven whole days in the library. Don't you think she
deserves a break?" I could see her point, but I decided
to acquiesce to the backseat woman's request.

A couple of miles down the highway, I see the light
of the moon reflecting eerily off the tile facade of
Waldo library. I pull of the highway and drive into a
parking space to let the woman out. But suddenly, the
glowing yellow lights were not attached to the library,
but mutated into the glowing yellow arches of McDonald's.
We are no longer in a parking lot, but at a drive-thru
window. Since we are there, I decide to order a Big Mac
with cheese, large fries and a large coffee; the other
women remain silent. As I pay at one window and then pull up to another to receive my food, I notice the restaurant’s logo on an employee’s shirt: "If you want form, go to Burger King—we are 100% substance." A woman hands me my order in a plain, gray paper bag. I open it up and find inside a vegetarian burger with artificial meat flavoring, a lettuce salad with diet dressing, and a large cup of hot water next to a small jar of Maxwell House instant coffee. I take a byte of the burger and spit it out in disgust.

I become angry and begin banging on the drive-thru window that has been shut tightly—nobody answers. The lights inside the restaurant go dim and finally fade to black. My car mysteriously shifts into gear and takes off, full speed ahead, back onto the Information Superhighway. The car is accelerating faster and faster, and as I tightly latch my seatbelt, I notice that I am suddenly alone in the car.

I have entered a world of virtual reality. Body pressed full back against the seat from the tremendous force of the speeding car, I begin crying. I think I must be hallucinating, as e-mail messages float disembodied through the air, gophers attempt to burrow into my car through the floorboards, information hijackers carry assault weapons, and computer terminals go racing by.
close to my window. The masculine hands of reflexivity knock menaciously and insistently at my window. I close my eyes in terror and continue crying.

I open my eyes just a crack to find the median littered with McDonald's hamburger wrappers and large, empty coffee cans. Virginia Woolf appears beside the speeding car, floating alongside and yelling out advice—she has transformed into a ghost, a disembodied spirit. "Go to it! You must get the word of the sisters out. Do your feminist critique, do it now!" I try to respond to her, but it seems I have lost my voice. She suddenly stops and as I glance into my rearview mirror, I see that she quickly recedes from view and then dissipates.

My head is spinning from the intense speed of the car. It doesn't seem possible, but I feel I am now going faster than ever before. My eyes roll up into my head and I become faint with nausea. My world begins spiraling and careening... my voice returns and I hear myself screaming...

Suddenly I am wide awake, sitting bolt upright in my own bed--back to real reality. Sweat is dripping from every pore and my pulse is racing. That was some nightmare, I think to myself as I wipe the sweat and stink from my underarms. Virginia Woolf is my feminist being, my link with the past. And the entire horror of the
Information Superhighway and the McDonaldization of society must represent the alienation I am experiencing in the modern world. The imagery from the dream ties in nicely with the feminist critique I seek to do of new literary forms, which originated as a process that allowed writers to break out of the formal, dehumanizing form of traditional, positivistic sociology—-to break free of the alienation.

This must be similar to what Native Americans experience when having a "vision." Concepts and ideas suddenly become clear in my head. I can envision the content of my thesis in my head. I must write it down! I leap out of bed and run to get myself a legal pad to write on. Back in bed and propped up against my pillows, I outline the remainder of my thesis.

I finish my outline with a deep sense of accomplishment, and decide to take a hot bath to relax myself for sleep, which will most likely be impossible because I am so wound up right now. As my bathwater runs I go out to the kitchen and open up the refrigerator: juice, wine, milk, pop. Nothing cold sounds good. I close the door and walk over to the cupboard; some steaming decaffeinated coffee would taste nice. I reach for the instant granules and decide against them. Instead, I get down the dusty old percolator that my mother gave me, and open
up a bag of Dark French Roast whole coffee beans that I
didn't realize I had. I even find a coffee grinder way
in the back of a junk drawer. For some strange reason I
feel like drinking "real" coffee this time. I rest
against the counter and wait, patiently, for my coffee to
brew.
CHAPTER II

THEORY AND REMEMBRANCE

Reminiscence With Biography: November, 1994

When I was a girl living under my parents' roof, things were much easier. I remember what I did when I became upset, or when I felt stressed out from school: I went into my very own bedroom, shut out the world behind a tightly closed door, and turned up my record player (later on it became a tape recorder, and then a portable stereo, and now it is a compact disc player). Listening to my favorite musicians, I would drift far away into a rich fantasy world of dancing and singing. Of course the boys I happened to be interested in at the time were always in these fantasies. I would be a very sassy, strong and sexy singer/dancer, and all of my favorite people--teachers, parents, friends, beaus, even famous people--would come and watch me perform, all the while admiring me for my appearance and my talent.

Sociologist George Ritzer (1992, p. 524) advocates the use of biography and autobiography in sociology. He writes: "Biographical and autobiographical work is useful in helping us understand the work of sociological
theorists, and of sociologists generally" (Ritzer, 1992, p. 524). Feminist sociologist, R. Ruth Linden, pairs her own autobiography with stories of Holocaust survivors in her book *Making stories, making selves* (1993). She contends that biographies and life histories "represent moments--sometimes crucial, sometimes not--when people remember and reinterpret themselves" (1993, p. 139). Perhaps my own longing for fantasy is part of my attraction for the new literary forms genre, for new literary forms allow me to present empirical findings as well as add those very important elements of creativity, even fantasy. The concerns that inform and underlie my feminist critique of new literary forms, in part, involve the differential ways in which women and men write about their findings and structure their creativity.

It is almost Christmas time and I have yet to discover who the mystery person is who communicated with me by e-mail. I'm progressing nicely with the first Chapter of my thesis, and am currently working on the theory section of the second Chapter. I have researched more extensively the issue of reflexivity in new literary forms.

Even after reading other authors who deal with new literary forms, I find myself continually referring to Malcolm Ashmore's (1989) text. I greatly respect and
admire his work. He returns to the origins of new literary forms—the sociology of scientific knowledge—and gives a very good overview of the most prominent theoretical stances concerning reflexivity. Ashmore’s (1989, p. xxiii) own belief is that reflexivity need not be problematic. He believes that the social sciences are "implicitly self-referential" (1989, p. 32), but in most cases, this reflexive character is essentially latent. He outlines three differing management strategies used by SSK scholars to deal with reflexivity (1989, p. xxviii): (1) some see it as a threat, (2) some use it as a critical tool, and (3) some see it as an opportunity.

Many SSK scholars follow the paths of tenets 2 and 3 (as does Ashmore), seeing reflexivity as an opportunity and a critical tool that will allow the social sciences to grow. For example, SSK scholar Ray Holland (1977, p. 267) is an advocate of reflexivity, positing that a theory should be able to account for itself, e.g., how it was produced. Holland (1977) also sees the liberating qualities associated with reflexive practice:

Sociology may now have overcome its imprinting on mistaken parent figures—the natural and physical sciences—so enabling it to recover its history, its subject matter and most powerful analytic tools: it has come of age. The condition of this emergence is a strong sociology of knowledge capable of turning sociology upon itself in continuous criticism and collective self-reflection—reflexivity at last. (p. 271)
As critical theorist Theodor Adorno contends, "It behooves a sceptical science to adopt an attitude of scepticism towards its own ascetic ideals" (Adorno, 1976, p. 252).

Other SSK practitioners also have something to say concerning reflexivity. David Bloor's (1976) "strong programme" in SSK, perhaps the best known in the field, incorporates reflexivity into the fourth tenet of his theory, along with symmetry, impartiality, and causality (pp. 4-5). The programme of Barry Barnes (1974) implicitly calls for reflexive practice because, as Ashmore points out, it "treats science as a form of culture just like any other" (1989, p. 8). Sociologists Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay (1984), creators of the programme of discourse analysis, entertain what Ashmore refers to as an "implicit reflexivity" (1989, p. 46), as well as a "positive reflexivity" (1989, p. 42). Perhaps Mulkay (1985) said it best when he so eloquently wrote: "the self-referential character of the sociological analysis of discourse is not something to be rejected or hidden, but rather to be welcomed and celebrated" (p. 155).

There is a division within SSK between those who view reflexivity is an opportunity and a critical tool, and those who feel it is a threat. Ashmore presents some
remarks from those who oppose reflexivity. The following quotes from SSK scholars Harry Collins and Bruno Latour, are taken from direct transcripts of correspondence and interviews with Malcolm Ashmore. Collins, with his fiery rhetoric, believes that reflexivity is "paralysing because you spend so much time looking up your own anus" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 20). He then goes one step further and forcefully states: "I just ban reflexivity" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 22)! Latour, on a more practical note, claims that, "Given the pressure of a scientific career, reflexivity is equivalent to suicide" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 24). SSK practitioner Trevor Pinch, along with Collins (1982, p. 190), reject the basic premise of reflexivity and would like to similarly outlaw reflexive practice because of the difficulties it creates in the work of science. And fellow SSK scholar Martin Hollis, in his article entitled "The social destruction of reality" (1982), attacks Bloor's strong programme, contending that, "Self-reference is an embarrassment, not a selling-point" (Hollis, 1982, p. 81).

Despite these oppositions to reflexivity, ethnomethodologists Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood (1975, p. 159) contend that reflexivity has proven itself and is here to stay: "There could be infinite sayings about reflexivity,
and still reflexivity would not be captured. Reflexivity will exhaust us long before we exhaust it."

Though many of the SSK practitioners "accept reflexivity in principle" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 26)--for example, Barnes and Bloor--for the most part, reflexivity seems to have little practical application in their work. On the other hand, SSK practitioners such as Ashmore, Latour, Mulkay, and sociologist Steve Woolgar "have made various attempts to incorporate the serious recognition of reflexivity into their analytic practices" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 26). Hence, the new literary forms movement was born--not from the wombs of women, but from the minds of men. An image of the Greek goddess, Athena, being born from the head of her father, Zeus, fills my mind. The absurdity of the metaphor makes me laugh.

Real Reflexivity, Artificial Trees:
December, 1994

I go to my parents' home in Jackson--home of the state prison--my childhood home, for Christmas. I consider myself a writer and hope to someday write my memoirs for future generations to read. I've kept a journal (I have consciously refrained from calling it a diary because of the gendered implications of that word) since I was in sixth grade, and I carry it everywhere when I travel. The Christmas holiday is no different.
After the holidays, I return to Kalamazoo, anxious to get back to my thesis. Now that Christmas is over, I find it fun to reflect upon my journal entries—in a sense, relive the experiences. Tonight I am taking a short break from my thesis and I begin reading the entries, starting with December 23rd . . .

December 23, 1994
Jackson, Michigan

Well, I am home for Christmas visiting Mom, Dad, and Scott [my brother]. I must mention the horrible tragedy that has befallen the Wolf household! We have always gone together to cut down our own fresh pine tree for Christmas—it was perhaps our most treasured family tradition. But this year, when I entered my parents' home, I found an artificial tree in the corner where a beautiful fresh one used to stand! What blasphemy! What an outrage! Scott is quite upset also. It seems that there is a war going on between form and substance, and the formal revolution looks to be victorious!

December 24, 1994
Jackson, Michigan

I tried to explain to Mom and Dad how very upset Scott and I are about the artificial tree. I even tried to get into the whole form v. substance debate, but they obviously did not understand. I tried to talk Scott into participating in a counterrevolution with me—I suggested we could fast on veggie burgers and bottled water until Mom and Dad gave in and cut down a fresh tree. But I guess my brother did not understand my position either. One sniff of Mom’s home cooking and he retreated to the enemy’s camp. Oh well, I tried!

December 25, 1994—Christmas Day!
Jackson, Michigan
I guess I will no longer need to eat and study upon my bed, as my family worked together to refinish an antique desk of my great grandmother’s to give to me as a gift. I am happy because the desk ties me to a woman’s past; they are all happy because that desk makes me appear more professional. There’s that issue of form versus substance again, incessantly controlling my Christmas holiday! At any rate, I am having a good break, though not a very relaxing one. I keep having horrible dreams in which Greek choruses (I’m not sure if they are fraternal or ancient) chant obscenities at me for not bringing work home to do over Christmas. And almost every night, garish faces—all twisted and contorted—float disembodied above my bed, all claiming to be the mysterious Professor Geezer who sent me the e-mail messages. Believe me, I will be glad to hop into my old Pontiac and head home to Kalamazoo . . .

Laughter overtakes me as I re-read the December 25th entry. I remember having those dreams! But now I am back to work in Kalamazoo, so hopefully the Greeks—Alpha Omega or Aristotle—will decide to leave me alone. I put down my journal, this time not on my nightstand, but on my new desk. My thoughts tonight are still on the issue of reflexivity.

I think of how Ashmore outlined the possibility of using reflexivity as a "critical tool" (Ashmore, 1989, p. xxviii). In the course of my readings of articles written as new literary forms, it sometimes occurs to me that some advocates of new literary forms treat this method as an end in and of itself. It seems to me that not only can reflexivity be utilized as a critical tool, but new literary forms can also.
New literary forms should be used as a method—not as the object of production. I decide to check Ashmore’s text (1989) for his stance on the use of new literary forms as method. I find that Ashmore does prefer to use new literary forms as a methodological tool. I am confused. Though both he and I believe that new literary forms should be used as a method, I find the ways in which we use new literary forms as method to be very different. Again, this definitely ties into the third Chapter of my thesis—the feminist critique of new literary forms. The outline of my critique begins to take concrete form, so I quickly make a note to myself on a yellow legal pad.

Reading my journal entries from Christmas really made me reflect on the life I’ve chosen to lead, as an academic. In particular, one incident stands out in my mind. When I was at my parents’ home visiting for the Christmas holiday, many of my old high school friends wanted me to explain my thesis to them. One of the most often asked questions concerning new literary forms was this: "Why write new literary forms?" I spouted all of the usual stuff about more creative freedom and striving for reflexivity. But I was not really satisfied with my answers. I make a resolution to do some more in-depth research on this very question. My starting point is to
uncover why other writers in sociology are using new literary forms. I begin reading and compiling notes at my desk.

I find that some argue for the aesthetic value of writing new literary forms. For example, in keeping with Ashmore's view, author Roland Barthes (1983) claims that the very nature of writing makes it a socially constructed art form:

Because it stages language, instead of simply using it, literature feeds knowledge into the machinery of infinite reflexivity. Through writing, knowledge ceaselessly reflects on knowledge, in terms of a discourse which is no longer epistemological, but dramatic. (pp. 463-464)

But what is the essence of the attraction to this marginal form of writing? Really what purpose(s) does it serve other than catering to the whims of writers who are "obsessed with methodology to the exclusion of all else. . . . The dire result is their unreadability and, much worse, their retention of a naive belief in the possibility of writing truer texts" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 60)? Mulkay (1984), an advocate of reflexivity and user of new literary forms, gives a very satisfying answer to this question:

If we accept that our own discourse, as analysts, is a flexible and contingent accomplishment, and . . . that our readings of participants' discourse are potentially multiple and open-ended, then it may be possible, through an awareness of, and a creative approach to, our
own discourse, to devise ways of accepting, coping with, even celebrating, reflexivity.
(p. 266)

Besides creating more questions than it answers, the more informal tone and structure of the work done as new literary forms also brings the reader into a dialectical process with the writing. Many new literary forms ban the writers' (i.e. the social scientists') claim to a privileged interpretation of their own work, and seek to uncover the "multivocal character" of all texts (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988, p. 4), as well as assuming the autonomy/free will/agency of the reader (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988, p. 13).

One of the main reasons I choose to write new literary forms is that I find them very liberating, "a release, however temporary, from the constraints of representational realism," as Ashmore (1989, p. xxix) so eloquently puts it. I think Pinch and Pinch (1988) sum up my position on new literary forms very nicely:

Some authors seem (e.g. Mulkay) to advocate unconventional writing, not as a means to deconstruct work in SSK, but just in the general sense of providing writers with greater freedom to make points in different ways. (p. 195)

Is That a Fact?

Speaking of the constraints of realism, there is an ongoing argument in the new literary forms literature concerning fact and fiction. Is it desirable for social
scientists to write in a fictional manner? If so, does fiction undermine the objective, serious tone of traditional natural science writing, which is what social scientists have sought to emulate?

Many scholars have criticized new literary forms—with such creative titles as "Don Quixote's Double" (Mulkay 1988), "Welcome to the PARASITE CAFE" (Pfohl 1990), and The Three Little Dinosaurs or a Sociologist's Nightmare" (Latour 1989)—saying that they are merely nonserious fictions. But, as Ashmore contends (1989, p. 66), the "explicitly fictional forms of writing" employed by writers of new literary forms, imply a "critique of the distinction between the fictional and the factual."

This leads us into a whole new world, where "... facts and fictions are interpretive creations" (Mulkay, 1985, p. 11), where "neither ... has a privileged relationship to the world in which we are interested" (Mulkay, 1985, p. 12). But if one translates fact and fiction into objective and subjective (respectively), I contend that the relationship of privilege is laid bare. I will explore this issue further in Chapter III.

In defense of new literary forms being explicitly fictional creations, Mulkay (1985, p. 11) posits that it is very hard to separate fact from fiction in writing, and that "there is no necessary, or even close, connec-
tion between the use of a fictional form, such as imaginary dialogue, and the endorsement of false statements about the world"--one is able to "extract certain facts from supposedly fictional texts." I especially like Rimbaud's phrase, "reflexive fiction," and apply it appropriately to new literary forms, for it denotes "the intertextual commingling of the real and the fictional" (quoted in Ashmore, 1989, p. 51).

As for charging new literary forms with the crime of nonseriousness, Ashmore happily admits and fully celebrates the fact that in his new literary forms, he adopts "an attitude of serious nonseriousness" (1989, p. 27). He contends that: "Serious purposes can be addressed with nonserious means" (1989, p. xxix). He even goes so far to say that even though many new literary forms have the appearance of nonseriousness, they are in fact serious in essence (Ashmore, 1989):

If the quality of nonseriousness is produced, as I claim, by the textual manipulation of appearance, then it would seem that the quality of seriousness must be the result of a similar process. And this means, in turn, that there is no intrinsic distinction between the serious and the nonserious. (p. 59)

Meeting With a Geezer: January, 1995

The New Year has come and gone and my thesis is progressing quite nicely. I decided to do myself a favor
and invest in my own computer. I’m moving even closer to the substantive image of a "real" academic. I must admit that I am getting quite fond of sitting at my new desk. In fact, I placed it (well out of range of the bedroom) in the livingroom of my apartment, with my new 486DX2/66 computer sitting atop it. I’m not quite sure what all of those numbers and slashes mean, but I’m told it is very impressive. I am struck by the oddity of seeing a brand new computer resting on a treasured, old antique. Perhaps Great Grandma would be offended that I even placed my computer atop her desk? At any rate, I can now work in the comfort of my own home.

Kalamazoo just got hit with another huge snowstorm, so I wisely decide to remain at home today, working on my thesis and nursing my aching head, not to mention my queasy stomach—let’s just say I went "out" last night and drank a little too much vino. I turn on the computer and situate myself in the uncomfortable office chair my father loaned me. It’s really quite funny—the desk is a beautiful antique belonging originally to a woman, and my father (an accountant) lends me a very stocky, masculine office chair to accompany the desk. I sense another form v. substance argument coming on.

I haul out my disks, preparing to begin the prologue to my feminist critique chapter. The glaring blue screen
makes my head ache even worse as I read: "Ginny, Please meet me in the basement of the Bernhard Center for lunch this afternoon. I think it is about time we met. Professor G." I blink hard a couple of times and rub my eyes to clear away the last vestiges of fuzziness from the night before. Nope, it was still there--another message from the Professor. How did he get the message to appear on my screen? An eerie sensation creeps over me and I quickly shut off the monitor. For some strange reason I have a fleeting thought of a hijacker on the Information Superhighway. My mind is racing, despite the pain of a headache. Should I meet with him or not?

I contemplate the situation as I take my morning shower, which makes my hangover much more bearable. The Bernhard basement is really quite a safe place to meet, as it has a string of fast food restaurants\(^6\) that are frequently populated during the noon hour. My overwhelming curiosity overrules my slight sense of fear, and I decide to attend the meeting. On my way out the door, I stop suddenly and walk slowly over to my desk. I reactivate the monitor--the screen is blank.

In the car on the way to Bernhard, my palms start sweating, which is very strange since the temperature is well below freezing. It must be nerves, I think to myself. I need a mental distraction. I decide to review
in my head the section of my thesis I have just completed--the paradoxes and ironies of writing new literary forms. I recall what the Ashmore text has to say on this topic.

New literary forms advocates as well as most SSK practitioners disagree over what to do about the paradoxes and ironies that seem to frequently permeate new literary forms writing. Ashmore (1989) summarizes the problem and offers a solution:

The problem lies in the basic assumption of the programme (i.e. the logical positivist movement) that no contradiction can be true and hence that the reasonings which result in the paradoxes must be fallacious. But there is an alternative: accept the adequacy of the reasoning which leads to paradox and embrace the category of dialetheia; some things just are both true and false. The end. (p. 69)

Just as Ashmore and his followers celebrate reflexivity in their new literary forms, they also embrace the sometimes paradoxical nature of writing and of the social sciences, claiming very dramatically that: "Closure is the enemy, the lover, the seduction, the trap" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 70). In practice, Ashmore is fond of using the new literary form device of "two contradictory endings" to deal with (i.e., celebrate) paradoxes (1989):

I present them both [contradictory endings], not in the spirit of offering alternatives (either/or) but rather in the spirit of paradox (both/and) which only stops those who . . . cannot get beyond the binary opposition which
paradox subverts by denying its very possibility. (p. 163)

I finish going over paradox and irony and realize that it has only taken me a couple of minutes to reconstruct this information. I need something else to occupy my mind until the meeting, to take my mind off of Professor Geezer. I decide to go over a very interesting section of my thesis--new literary forms critique. But before I allow my mind to wander into this new topic, I pause for a moment and think how sad it is that a vibrant, young, 23-year-old woman is occupying her free time thinking about new literary forms critique. I should be out partying, I think to myself. But then the slight twinges of a still present headache remind me that I did plenty of that last night.

The roads are very slippery, and as I round a sharp corner, I almost run over two frolicking little squirrels, or maybe they were gophers? I hope this is not an omen for how the rest of my day is going to go. I force my mind to drift into new literary forms critique. Pinch and Pinch (1988, p. 179), write a clever article in which they use a new literary form as a critical tool to speak out against the use of new literary forms, claiming that they are "at best trivial and at worst distracting." Many skeptics see new literary forms as an expression of
"self conscious cleverness" and not as viable forms of "narrative organization" (Woolgar 1988a, p. 32).

I am interrupted in the course of my critique, as I pull into a designated parking space at school. I notice it is almost noon, and realize I must hurry or else I will be late. As the frigid Michigan wind chaps my face and my hands, I realize that I still have one whopping headache. I pause for just a moment to extract the Excedrin from my backpack, and pop two bitter pills into my mouth before trudging through the snow the rest of the way to the Bernhard Center.

I realize that I have no idea what this man looks like. I am expecting perhaps an older man—he calls himself Professor—very scholarly looking, with salt and pepper hair. But he is dressed casually, in jeans, as sociologists are apt to do. I realize that I am stereotyping, but I guess even sociologists are not immune to preconceptions (or misconceptions, however the case may be). I unbutton my coat as I enter the double doors leading down the stairs to the Bernhard basement. The smell of burgers and fries overwhelms my nostrils, and I am sorely tempted to go the fast food route for lunch. I take out my wallet from my bag and proceed to count my cash to see if I have enough money to buy lunch, when a cold hand touches mine.
"Excuse me, you're Ginny Wolf, aren't you?" I look up into pale blue eyes and a powdery white face, stunned. In front of me was no middle-aged man with graying hair. Much to my surprise, the Professor is a woman.
CHAPTER III

LOOKING FOR SISTERS

Discovering Julia: January, 1995

Her name is Dr. Julia Smith—"Please call me Julia"--and she is a professor of Women's Studies. She explains to me during the course of our luncheon that she is a computer whiz and she thought it would be fun to send me secret e-mail messages concerning new literary forms. She has been studying the topic very casually for a couple of years and decided that she would help me out with my thesis by graciously, but secretly, giving me information she had uncovered. She also tells me that she is dedicated to mentoring young women like me. When I ask her how she managed to send me the messages on particular terminals at specific times, she just smiles and takes a bite of her tuna submarine sandwich (minus the tuna, as she is a vegetarian).

After only an hour of talking and eating, it seems I have known Julia my entire life. She is very intelligent and witty, and she cares passionately for women's issues, though I do find her a bit old-fashioned. I tell her of my growing interest in doing a feminist critique of new
literary forms, and she seems very happy about it. She has done some research on feminism and new literary forms, and she suggests a very logical starting point for me—women, specifically feminists, in science.

I remember reading about the issue of multivocality in the new literary forms literature: "Many voices are not enough when they are still aggressive male voices" (Pinch and Pinch, 1988, p. 186)! In fact, if you refer to Ashmore's list of the Core Set of Sociologists of Scientific Knowledge, or CSSSK (Ashmore, 1989, pp. 16-19),

Malcolm Ashmore, Barry Barnes, David Bloor, Harry Collins, Nigel Gilbert, Bill Harvey, Jon Harwood, Karin Knorr-Cetina, Bruno Latour, Mike Lynch, Donald MacKenzie, Michael Mulkay, Andy Pickering, Trevor Pinch, Jonathon Potter, David Travis, Steve Woolgar, and Steven Yearley, you will find that the formal SSK/new literary forms movement is comprised almost entirely of men. I tell Julia that I think finding women's voices in science will be difficult, as I know that most SSK practitioners are men. However, I discover via Julia that there are a few women writers in the area of science studies that may be of some help—for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding.

We end our luncheon and Julia tells me to give her a call anytime I need any help; she writes her number down on a piece of napkin left over from our meal. She claims
she has to rush back for a Women's Studies organizational meeting, and runs off towards Wood Hall, overcoat flying in the wind behind her. I notice she dropped a book on the ground, so I bend over to pick it up. As I prepare to call to her, I see that she has virtually disappeared. I decide to walk over to Wood Hall and leave it in the Women's Studies Department for her.

"I'm sorry. There's no professor here by that name," the Women's Studies secretary tells me. That's strange, I think to myself. I pull out the telephone number Julia left with me and ask the woman if this is the number for Women's Studies. Shaking her head, she says she doesn't recognize it. Confused, I leave the office, taking the book with me. But not before secretly checking the faculty mailboxes around the corner to search for Julia Smith--she was not there. She never actually said she worked here at WMU, but I just assumed she did--especially when she went flying off towards Wood Hall. As well as being confused, I also feel a strange and unexplainable sense of loss, of loneliness, as I drive home.

That night, I lay awake in bed, still reliving my meeting with Dr. Smith--Julia--and ponder the fact that I cannot seem to locate her. I am excited to begin my search for feminist critique materials in the morning,
and feel my heart pumping with anticipation. Sleep is going to come very slowly to me tonight. I decide to open up my cedar chest and look at old photos to help pass the time until I feel tired.

I like to call this beautiful piece of furniture my "hope chest," though I really don't know why. My mother used to refer to it as such when I was younger, so I guess it is just a habit. My grandmother--my mother's mother--gave it to me as a gift when I graduated from high school. It is made of very fine wood and the top is covered by a stunning tapestry of many colors. I would say that this chest is my most prized possession, not because of the chest itself, but because of its contents. All of my most special memories can be found in that chest--photos, diaries, baby clothes knitted for me by Mom, old corsages, and special gifts from cherished friends and relatives.

Tonight I pick up an old photo album that contains pictures of my mother's ancestors--mostly women. This old album was given to me by my grandfather's sister, and its age shows in the dusty pages, with their worn and torn edges. Looking at these pictures really gives me a sense of nostalgia, of history. I feel very connected to these women, though I didn't know any of them. As I flip the next page I come to my great grandmother. I feel
especially close to her, since I now have her antique desk. Her name was Julia Smith. JULIA SMITH!

The name stared at me--big black letters scrawled underneath her picture. I gulped hard and slammed the album shut. Remembering the book Julia dropped this afternoon, I run to inspect its contents. It is a diary--a diary written by Julia Miller Smith, dating back almost 100 years. I did not meet with a WMU Women's Studies professor for lunch--I met with the ghost of my great grandmother!¹⁹

Sisters of Science Found: February, 1995

It takes me most of the night and a good portion of the following two weeks to get over the shock of discovering I actually had an encounter with a metaphysical being. Perhaps she goes wherever her desk goes; perhaps I just imagined her. But if she is not real, how could I possibly have her diary? At any rate, I have decided that Julia's "appearance" (whether form or substance) has special meaning for my work. Great grandmother Julia has sent me on a journey--a journey to find my epistemological sisters. She wants me to turn to contemporary history, to my feminist predecessors for help.

The next day, I decide to hit the books at the library again, this time with a specific direction in
mind. As I walk past some computer terminals on the way to my favorite table on the second floor, I glance at the screens, half expecting another message from Great Grandmother Julia. I suppose I could just call her Julia--after all, that is what she told me to call her at lunch. That is, if she was really there. At any rate, I feel this childlike need to show her respect, now that I have discovered she is my great grandma. I wouldn't even walk up to my own mother and call her Nancy! But I vow to try and call Great Grandma by her given name; it seems she wants it this way.

I do as Julia suggested and begin with the women in science. Actually, my starting point has been right under my nose for months--I just haven't noticed. Evelyn Fox Keller is an historian and a philosopher of science within the field of science and technology studies (S&TS-). She has an article in the same handbook (Jasanoff et al., 1995) as the article containing the nameless woman (Ashmore et al., 1995), so I had to lug that huge book all the way to the library (again!) so I could make a copy.

Unlike the article written by the men (Ashmore et al., 1995), Keller's article appeals to my feminist side. I am surprised I haven't noticed it before. Keller disaggregates "gender and science" into "its component
parts" (1995, p. 86) and calls for a study of "gender in science" (p. 86). She suggests a "new taxonomy" for the sciences (1995, p. 86)--the study of "the uses of gender in scientific constructions of subjects and objects that lie both beneath and beyond the human skin (or skeleton)" (1995, p. 86). She brings up some very important issues that I want to explore in my critique of new literary forms. For example, Keller points to the connection between patriarchy and the dominance of positivistic science (1995):

For some, a suspicion that 'objectivity' might be a code for 'domination' went hand in hand with the fantasy that we had hold of a lever with which we could not only liberate women but also turn our disciplines upside down--perhaps, even change the world. (p. 83)

I definitely want to explore issues of objectivity, subjectivity and privilege in the third chapter of my thesis.

I turn next to Donna Haraway, hominid biologist turned historian of science. I find her text, *Simians, cyborgs, and women* (1991) to be absolutely fascinating reading. She is a very creative writer, albeit a bit strange at times. For example, on a single page of her text (p. 189), she speaks of the "god-trick," "techno-monsters," and "eye fucks"--her language conjures vivid images in relation to patriarchy and men's conceptions of science. Like Keller, she also brings up issues of
feminist objectivity, writing that we have been "trapped by two poles of a tempting dichotomy on the question of objectivity" (1991, p. 183). On the one hand, there is the argument of the social constructionist, in which "no insider’s perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth" (p. 184). This social constructionist view is what David Bloor calls his "strong programme" (1976), which was discussed above. However, Haraway indicates that some, herself included, wanted to go beyond "showing bias in science" (p. 186) and held out for a "feminist version of objectivity" (p. 186), which "requires a knowledge tuned to resonance, not to dichotomy" (p. 194).

After skimming just a couple of chapters in Haraway’s text, I know that she will prove to be a vital link in my feminist critique of new literary forms. I mark the passages that I find to be relevant to the third chapter of my thesis--mostly ones dealing with privilege, objectivity and epistemology. I decide to move on to Sandra Harding.

The most interesting and relevant discussion I decide to explore with Harding (1991) is what she refers to as "feminist standpoint epistemology" (p. 119). I can take many aspects of her reading of this theory and
readily apply it to my own critique of new literary forms. This approach is rooted in the philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lukacs (p. 120). Feminist standpoint theory focuses on "gender differences, on differences between women’s and men’s situations which give a scientific advantage to those who can make use of the differences" (p. 120). Standpoint epistemology also recognizes difference for what it is: "difference is only difference, not a sign of inferiority" (p. 122). To create a feminist objectivity, Harding claims that we must include women’s life experiences as the bases for scientific epistemologies, and we must overcome our "excessive reliance on distinctively masculine lives" (p. 123).

This fits in well with the argument I am trying to make concerning the men writing new literary forms. These male writers use their privileged position within the academy and within patriarchy to perpetuate modes of knowledge and methods of writing "objectively" that do not include nor speak to women’s epistemologies.

Reflexivity in the Feminine

The next book (Linden, 1993) comes to me from my advisor, who has just written a book dealing with the Holocaust (Markle, 1995). I mentioned Linden’s book

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before because of its focus on autobiography. Linden's work is incredibly personal and reflexive. She writes: "My self-reflections became an integral component of my research, inseparable from the book about Holocaust survivors I had initially planned to write" (Linden, 1993, p. 2). She calls her writing "experimental," and she explicitly calls her book "reflexive" (Linden, 1993, p. 10). Markle's book is also reflexive, but in a different way.¹²

Ashmore seems to advocate Woolgar's (1988a) definition of reflexivity, which Woolgar defines as "the willingness to probe beyond the level of straightforward interpretation" (p. 14). But is this definition really helpful for a feminist? I think not. What is more helpful is Ashmore's (1989) division of reflexivity into three different types: (1) reflexivity as "self-reference," (2) reflexivity as "self-awareness," and (3) reflexivity as "the constitutive circularity of accounts" (p. 32). The third variant of reflexivity refers to "a general and universal feature of accounting procedures," and is a technical term employed in ethnomethodology (Ashmore, 1989, p. 32). Because of its narrow application, I would like to leave reflexivity as the constitutive circularity of accounts, and focus on the other two variants.
Linden’s writing is an example of reflexivity as self-referential--she uses the Holocaust to understand herself. Self-referential refers to the ability to critically examine yourself. My thesis is also an example of reflexivity as self-referential. For feminist writers, reflexivity is synonymous with self-referential. Ashmore (1989) points out that this self-referential aspect of reflexivity has been very controversial and is often latent (p. 32).

On the other hand, Markle is also being reflexive--as are the new literary forms men--but in a very different way. Markle and the new literary forms men use reflexivity as self-awareness, for introspection. Markle’s use of reflexivity in his writing (1995) is an attempt to use himself to understand the Holocaust. Ashmore points out (1989) that reflexivity as self-awareness, unlike women’s use of reflexivity, is "rarely problematic" (p. 32). The distinction between different varieties of reflexivity has helped me understand why I am feeling uncomfortable with Ashmore et al.’s (1995) use of the nameless woman. Their claim to reflexivity is indeed not of the self-referential variety. How can their woman be self-referential when she is not a real character, but a purposely "gendered" fiction (Ashmore et al., 1995, p. 323)?
Mary Jacobus (1982), professor of English and Women's Studies at Cornell University, uses the language of the well-known French feminist Luce Irigaray to point out that "masculine systems of representation are those whose self-reflexiveness and specularity\textsuperscript{13} disappropriate women of their relation to themselves and to other women" (p. 38).

I am feeling very sleepy and decide to lay my head down on the table for a few moments. I drift in and out of consciousness, feeling slight breezes of air hit me as people gently walk by. I hear low voices, whispering in the book stacks, unintelligible and far away. I don't know how much time has passed, but suddenly I hear a very distinct, woman's voice: "Ginny... Ginny, it's me, Julia. Come to the Women's Studies department as soon as possible... I have a surprise for you!"

Close Encounter of the Sisterly Kind

The frigid February air wakes me up as I trudge over to Wood Hall. I thought we were supposed to have an early spring this year? Or perhaps our beloved groundhog is going blind. As I approach the double doors leading into Wood Hall, I find I am a bit apprehensive and even a little scared to enter. I am not a big believer in the supernatural--at least I wasn't before Julia appeared.
Or perhaps I should say re-appeared. I take a deep
breath and swing the doors open wide.

The hallway is dark and dead; nobody seems to be
around. Julia didn't specify where I was to go, so I
begin wandering towards the Women's Center office on the
first floor. It is located at the end of the hallway.
As I approach the office door, I see that it is ajar; a
dim light shines out into the hallway, creating a trian­
gle of yellow light on the dirty tile floor. I consider
running back to the library, but instead decide to take a
chance. After all, I am a brave and daring young woman.
I take another deep breath and enter the office.

The light is coming from a small conference room
directly across from the office door; I decide to check
in there first. Much to my surprise, two women sit very
quietly in the room; Julia is on an old red couch and I
don't recognize the other woman.

"Please come in, Ginny" says Great Grandma Julia.
"There's someone I want you to meet." I walk further
into the room and look closely at the other woman, who
sits very stiff and straight in her chair, with her hands
draped haphazardly about her crossed legs. Julia intro­
duces her to me: "Ginny, I'd like you to meet Virginia
Woolf, your namesake."
I must have passed out, because when I open my eyes, I am lying on the red couch with Julia and Virginia bending over me. I remembered having a dream about Virginia Woolf; she gave me advice on the Information Superhighway, and provided the impetus for the outline of my thesis. I am very pleased to meet her and speak with her in person. I am slowly getting accustomed to the fact that I am spending too much time lately with ghosts.

Soon I am feeling better and they proceed to tell me that they like to travel around to various colleges and universities, checking out the Women's Studies departments and wandering through the libraries. Virginia tells me she is fond of going to the computerized finder systems and calling up her own name on the screen. They tell me that an education, let alone at the graduate level, was very difficult for women of their times to obtain. So, they vowed that when they died, they would spend eternity mentoring young women.

Enlightening Epistemologies

Virginia didn't talk much. Every once in a while during the course of our conversation, she interjects with wise, little sayings. For example, one of my favorites is: "Science, it would seem, is not sexless; she is a man, a father, and infected too" (Woolf, 1938, p. 139).
She seems fond of issues of feminist epistemology, especially in relation to science.

She is also familiar with R. Ruth Linden and tells us how she speaks of "how knowledge is constructed and represented in the human sciences" (Linden, 1993, p. 2). The traditional mode of practicing ethnography, which is both informed by patriarchy and positivism, serves to "obscure both subjectivity and agency" (Linden, 1993, p. 2). It also "blur[s] the fact that meanings, by their very nature, are indeterminate, situated, and emergent" (Linden, 1993, p. 2). I am getting a feeling that feminist epistemologies are very different from those practiced by the new literary forms men. I decide that this conversation can greatly inform my thesis, so I begin to take copious notes.

Julia takes over speaking about the historical traditions of epistemology. She quotes feminist epistemologists, Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993): "[A] conservative approach that preserves traditional assumptions and strategies is not a virtue in feminist work" (p. 2). I ask Julia to slow down her speech so I can get some quotes for my thesis (Alcoff & Potter, 1993):

The history of feminist epistemology itself is the history of the clash between the feminist commitment to the struggles of women to have their understandings of the world legitimated and the commitment of traditional philosophy to various accounts of knowledge--positivist,
postpositivist, and others--that have consistently undermined women's claims to know. (p. 2)

I see that the epistemological assumptions used by male scientists take on a very strong positivistic edge. Alcoff and Potter (1993, p. 4) claim that the "current paradigm of knowledge is taken to be the observation of everyday simple objects, such as sticks, apples, and patches of color." This dominant paradigm, which is definitively masculine, takes epistemology to be universal, denying and negating the need to take subjectivity into account (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 4). Of course, the claim to universality does not sit well in feminist epistemological circles (Alcoff & Potter, 1993):

Feminist analyses in philosophy, as in other disciplines, have insisted on the significance and particularity of the context of theory. This has led many feminist epistemologists to skepticism about the possibility of a general or universal account of the nature and limits of knowledge, an account that ignores the social context and status of knowers. (p. 1)

Alcoff and Potter also contend that "[p]art of the reason why the masculinity of knowledge remains hidden is because it lacks a contrast that would force its sexuality into relief" (1993, p. 10).

Julia takes a detour and begins arguing with Virginia about postmodernism. I find postmodernism to be thoroughly frustrating, confusing, and intriguing. Several of the statements made by the new literary forms
writers were implicitly postmodern, and many of the feminist theorists I use in my critique take postmodern positions. So, I know that the postmodern issue is an important one for my thesis. But because I consider postmodernism to be a black hole, I prefer to leave it alone.

I let Julia and Virginia banter for a few minutes more, and then decide to intervene. I saw Virginia's face begin to redden when Julia advocated the postmodernist claim that "there is no subject or agent of knowledge" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 8). I tell them that, though I am very interested in learning about postmodern perspectives, I really want to concentrate on my new literary forms critique at the moment. I suggest we move into issues of objectivity, since that seems to be a critical concept to both feminist epistemology and that of the men I seek to critique.

Subjectively, I Object to Male Objectivity!

From Julia, I learned that "[i]t may be, for instance, that it was feminist scholars who initially raised the question of cultural constructions of objectivity as a central issue for investigation" (Keller, 1995, p. 91). I tell Virginia and Julia that I have purchased a two volume set of journals, filled with articles
dealing specifically with objectivity (Annals of Scholarship, 8:3-4, 1991; 9:1-2, 1992). Both issues are at my apartment, so I invite Julia and Virginia to accompany me home. They agree, and I feel a rush of anticipation at the thought of showing these women where I live. However, since they are ghosts, they probably have already seen my place. The thought sends tiny shivers down my spine.

Both women are very quiet as I drive them to my apartment. In fact, as we enter my building and board the elevator, I am grateful for the company of Jane Innis, my neighbor who is already inside waiting to ascend to the forth floor. She is an avid talker, so I think of introducing her to Virginia and Julia. But as I turn around to gesture towards my two visitors, they are nowhere to be found. Apparently they don’t like to interact with just any human.

Once inside my apartment, they reappear and we get to work discussing objectivity. I open up my thesis file on the computer and show them what I have written on the topic so far. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a tear run down Great Grandma Julia’s face, as she recognizes her old desk. Though I looked at every article contained in the two volumes, I only found two in particular that related to my research (Hawkesworth, 1991;
Megill, 1991). I sit down at the desk and slowly scroll down the screen, as Julia and Virginia begin to read.

As editor of both volumes of the journal, I find Allan Megill's comprehensive discussion of the "four principal senses" of objectivity to be very helpful to my feminist critique (1991, p. 301). The papers that comprise both volumes of the journal cover more extensively these four types of objectivity, known as: (1) absolute, (2) disciplinary, (3) dialectical, and (4) procedural (p. 301).

The first type of objectivity is called a "philosophical or absolute sense" (Megill, 1991, p. 301). This perspective seeks to represent "things as they really are" (p. 302). The disciplinary sense of objectivity is closely tied to the absolute sense. Megill defines the disciplinary sense institutionally, as "the claim by practitioners of a particular discipline . . . to have authoritative jurisdiction over its area of competence" (p. 305). Both absolute and disciplinary objectivity have a "negative relation to subjectivity. Absolute objectivity seeks to exclude subjectivity; disciplinary objectivity seeks to contain it" (p. 307). Dialectical objectivity, which involves "an interaction between researcher and object" (p. 306), takes a different
position. Megill describes dialectical objectivity as involving

a positive attitude toward subjectivity. The defining feature of dialectical objectivity is the claim that subjectivity is indispensable to the constituting of objects. Associated with this feature is a preference for "doing" over "viewing." (p. 308)

And finally, the procedural sense of objectivity can be seen as a "modification of absolute objectivity" (p. 310). Procedural objectivity focuses solely on impersonality of procedure, abstracting from the hoped-for aim of truth; thus it widens the gap between "truth" and "objectivity" that is already present in the discussion of absolute objectivity. (p. 310)

In my critique of new literary forms, I specifically employ the definitions of the absolute and the dialectical senses of objectivity. I would like to construct a polemic between the men writing new literary forms and feminist writers such as myself, to help in understanding the differential ways in which each gender conceptualizes the objective/subjective argument. It is my contention that Ashmore and his fellow new literary forms writers--in the process of seeking to sustain an "authentic reflexive practice" (Ashmore, 1989, p. 83)--have not broken free of an absolute sense of objectivity.

For example, Ashmore et al. (1995) still put distance between themselves as researchers and the subject they are studying--the nameless woman. In fact, the
woman becomes object. Evelyn Fox Keller supports my argument in her discussion of science as masculine: "Masculine here connotes, as it so often does, autonomy, separation, and distance. It connotes a radical rejection of any commingling of subject and object" (1978, p. 415).

Feminist writers, on the other hand, employ objectivity in the dialectical sense. We seek to enter into a relationship with those that we study. I’ll use myself as an example, after all, I am not only a feminist writer, but I also utilize new literary forms. I do not seek to be what is absolutely defined as objective. I create virtually no distance between myself as researcher and the subject of my narrative, who is also myself. Ginny’s experiences are my experiences. I have intimate knowledge of my subject, whereas Ashmore et al. (1995), as males, do not. Political theorist Mary Hawkesworth (1991) supports my argument that the new literary forms written by men create distance between subject and object, with a statement she takes from Thomas Nagel: "Claims of detachment, disinterest, distance, and universality merely serve as mechanisms for male hegemony, substituting certain men’s perspectives for an impossible view from nowhere" (p. 454).
Hawkesworth (1991), provides a very helpful overview of recent feminist critiques of objectivity. She also gets into the relationship between objectivity and privilege. Though the male new literary forms writers claim to ban researcher privilege, I contend that the manner in which these men construct objectivity does not allow them to do this successfully.

Hawkesworth opens her paper with a question: "What should the feminist stance toward objectivity be: reclamation or rejection" (1991, p. 451)? Hawkesworth, to use the above categories of Megill, speaks exclusively here about the absolute sense of objectivity. She contends that feminists have critiqued objectivity because of a broken promise, a promise that objectivity would "free us from distortion, bias, and error in intellectual inquiry and from arbitrariness, self-interest, and caprice in ethical, legal, and administrative decisions" (1991, p. 452). Hawkesworth points to the historically "erroneous claims" and pervasive "mistakes" concerning the nature of women as evidence of this broken promise (p. 452). She also contends that feminists have explored the notion that investigations of both the natural and the social world are "value-permeated rather than value-neutral" (p. 453).
In keeping with Hawkesworth's perspective, Haraway (1991) writes that the feminist problem of constructing objectivity is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. (p. 187)

In other words, Haraway believes that feminist objectivity simply means situated knowledges (1991, p. 188).

The term situated knowledges encompasses many definitions. It includes consideration of the "particularity and embodiment of all vision" (Haraway, 1991, p. 189), and a "feminist writing of the body" that emphasizes vision (p. 189). Haraway writes that only the feminist notions of partial perspectives and situated knowledges hold out the promise of a truly objective vision (p. 190). While a non-feminist objectivity is about the "splitting of subject and object" (p. 190), feminist objectivity "is about limited location and situated knowledge" (p. 190).

The splitting of subject and object is exactly the point I want to make about men writing new literary forms. While feminist writers seek to unite subject
object, or at least explore the relationship between the two, a non-feminist construction of subject and object, as embodied by the male new literary forms writers, splinters this relationship. Ashmore et al.'s (1995) article with the nameless woman is an excellent example of this point.

Discussions of objectivity again bring us to the issue of privilege. The distance and disinterest required to practice the male notion of absolute objectivity, implicitly imply that the researcher's position is privileged over that of his subject(s). Feminist scholars who have contended that "objectivity lies beyond reclamation" (Hawkesworth, 1991, p. 454), have formulated alternative conceptions of objectivity that deny the researchers any claims to privileged status. For example, a reformulation of what we may call a feminist notion of objectivity, would include a "capacity of critical reflection," as well as a healthy dose of intersubjectivity (Hawkesworth, 1991, p. 468). Feminist objectivity would demand inclusivity--specifically, the inclusion of women and people of color (Hawkesworth, 1991, p. 468). Finally, a feminist notion of objectivity "cannot be attained within the preserves of privilege" (Hawkesworth, 1991, p. 468).
Interrupting her reading, Julia tells us that in her opinion, privilege is intimately tied to constructions of men's Truth, as opposed to women's truths. For example, Haraway entitles chapter nine of her book (1991), "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspectives," indicating that from a feminist perspective, there is no Truth with a capital "T." Also, Alcoff and Potter (1993), in the title of their work, use the plural "epistemologies," claiming that there is no "single referent" for the term epistemology (p. 1). Julia also refers to Linden (1993) on the issue of privilege: "...truth is rarely singular or absolute. There are only truths: relative, changing, emergent--as new light is shed on familiar circumstances. And silences, too, are a matter of degree." (p. ix). Notice that Linden uses a lower case "t" for truths, as well as the plural form of the word, indicating there is no universal.

**Subjectivity Revived**

We decide to take a break for lunch, so I make us a vegetarian stir fry. I ask Virginia and Julia why they have to be vegetarian if they are ghosts? Much to my disappointment, they tell me that women have to watch their appearance even in the nether regions.
After lunch, I bring up the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray, whom I have been reading lately, and ask for Virginia’s and Julia’s opinions on her work. I tell them that perhaps her writing does not speak explicitly to the context of the subjectivity/objectivity argument concerning new literary forms. But I believe some of her insights can be readily incorporated into my feminist critique. I give them some background on Irigaray in case they are not familiar with her work.

Rosi Braidotti, Professor of Women’s Studies at the University of Utrecht, claims that Irigaray’s work seeks to redesign the way we conceptualize subjects. Irigaray seeks to discover a "language and a form of representation that adequately renders women’s experience" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 111). Irigaray is an essentialist (Schor, 1994, p. 59); she brings women’s bodies into sharp focus, and even "sexualizes in the feminine the very structures of subjectivity" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 111). Braidotti (1994) eloquently and powerfully explains Irigaray’s perspective:

An elemental sort of female cosmology pervades Irigaray’s work: a firm, even shocking determination to return to the female imaginary the colors, the shapes, and the tempo of woman’s passions, her thoughts, her perceptions, and the specific patterns of interaction that mark her as sexed female. (pp. 111-112)
Braidotti explains that Irigaray posits a redefinition of female subjectivity—how do we "make the feminine express a different difference, a pure difference," that breaks out of the trap of binary thinking that is a trademark of the Western world (Braidotti, 1994, p. 112).

Metatheorist and feminist, Kathy Ferguson, posits that maleness has been equated with humanness (Ferguson, 1993, p. 38). Male subjectivity "constitutes the self as bounded agent in the world, the center of all things, active, reflective, coinciding neatly . . . with itself" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 38). It seems to me that Ferguson has a lot to say concerning the issue of the nameless woman. Perhaps I am obsessed with thoughts of this nameless, bodyless woman, but I believe she is central to my critique. Ashmore et al. (1995) believed they were creating an active subject in the form of the nameless woman. But in the context of their writing, she was confined to a male notion of subjectivity (Ferguson, 1993):

Women in male humanist [subjective] discourse have generally been among those others, consigned to the world of the acted-upon, of otherness colonized in the service of maintaining the sameness of the subject. All male-ordered constructions of subjectivity do not necessarily figure women in the same terms. (p. 38)

Before continuing, I tell Julia and Virginia that I want to make sure we explore essentialism and its place in the feminist movement, as well as its contribution to
my critique of new literary forms, though it is very controversial. Ferguson (1993) claims that feminists have long struggled "between efforts to redefine the gendered subject by centering it in women's experiences and efforts to deconstruct the gendered subject altogether" (p. 15). Both women look a bit nervous at the prospect of discussing essentialism, so I decide to offer them drinks and some dessert to lighten the mood.

The Essentials of Essentialism

As I have already mentioned, from my own experience and the tone of my readings on essentialism, I know that this controversial philosophy has caused and is causing great conflict within the feminist movement. Julia and Virginia wholeheartedly agree, and I can see that Virginia is beginning to loosen up a bit. Plus, she had at least three glasses of wine so far.

I think we need to begin our discussion with a definition of essentialism, just so we all understand what we are talking about. So, I tell them about Namoi Schor's--a Professor of Romance Studies and Comparative Literature at Duke University--definition of essentialism, which she takes from the Dictionary of philosophy and religion (Schor, 1994):

essentialism is the belief that things have essences.
context of feminism consists in the belief that woman has an essence, that woman can be specified by one or a number of inborn attributes that define across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being and in the absence of which she ceases to be categorized as a woman. (p. 59)

Schor goes on to further explain that the female body remains "the rock of feminism" to the essentialist (1994, p. 60). Elaine Showalter, a Professor of English at Princeton, agrees with Schor, claiming that essentialist or biologically-based feminism "generally stresses the importance of the body as a source of imagery" (Showalter, 1982, p. 18). For example, metaphors of pregnancy, gestation, and birth are widely used.

Personally, I believe that the essentialist position is potentially dangerous, especially within the context of our patriarchal system. Agreeing with me, Julia says, "Simply to invoke anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism, the phallic and ovarian theories of art, that oppressed women in the past" (Showalter, 1982, p. 17). Virginia agrees, and asks me why I am including an essentialist argument in my thesis?

That is a good question, and one I have been pondering a lot lately. Though I do consider the biological determinism of an essentialist position to be potentially dangerous, I do struggle with the notion of completely disregarding the body, as I believe mainstream feminism
does. Perhaps by taking some aspects from the essentialist camp and coupling them with standpoint theory (for example) would help to enrich feminist epistemologies and philosophies. Women do have bodies as well as minds, and it seems to me that we should pay attention to both dimensions. Plus, I tell them, there are some revolutionary aspects of essentialist thought that greatly appeal to me. Sometimes it seems that mainstream American or cultural approaches to feminism are operating too much within the system and maintaining a reformist attitude.

I have already taken from Harding’s discussion of feminist standpoint theory, which does not suggest "that the biological differences between women and men provide the resources for feminist analysis" (Harding, 1991, p. 133). In other words, feminist standpoint theory is explicitly anti-essentialist. But at a time when the feminist movement is characterized by fragmentation, I think perhaps a consideration of essentialist feminist arguments will provide my critique with a richer framework within which to operate.

Julia asks if we can leave the essentialist camp for the moment and discuss explicitly women’s writing and how it differs from men’s. I am very eager to speak on this topic, as it is integral to my thesis critique of new
literary forms. I poise on the edge of my seat, notebook in lap and pen in hand. Virginia begins by using her own life as an example.

On Women’s Writing

She tells us how most professions were historically closed to women, except for that of writing (Woolf, 1938, p. 140). And, still a bit angry towards the tenets of essentialism, Virginia haughtily adds, "And moreover, whatever the brain might do when the professions were opened to it, the body remained" (1938, p. 140). Virginia then says that though she is definitely anti-essentialist, she will admit that "A woman’s writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine" (quoted in Showalter, 1982, p. 14).

But what is meant by "feminine" writing? Julia contends that we can go in a few different directions with this question. Linguistic and textual theories of women’s writing, according to Showalter (1982), would ask whether men and women use language differently; whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked. (p. 20)
Judith Kegan Gardiner, Professor of English at the University of Illinois, identifies two main feminist positions that explore women's writing. The most common answer as to why women's writing is different, she says, is because "women's experiences differ from men's in profound and regular ways" (Gardiner, 1982, p. 178). This is evident in the differential imagery employed by women writers (p. 178). Virginia points out that this experiential difference is manifested very clearly in my thesis writing, as opposed to the writing of the new literary forms men.

The other main explanation, she contends, "posits a female consciousness that produces styles and structures innately different from those of the masculine mind" (Gardiner, 1982, p. 178). It seems to me that this second argument is somewhat essentialist in nature. Plus, this argument is not readily visible when one compares my thesis with the new literary forms written by men.

I tell Julia and Virginia that I am partial to her former argument that takes women's differential experiences into account. In fact, this, I argue, is one of the primary reasons why my version of a new literary form is different from those created by men. And differential experience is also why Ashmore et al.'s (1995) use of the nameless woman does not work--her experiences are not
those of a real woman. Her experiences are created and
to be "fluid," less linear and more circular (Gardiner,
1982, p. 185), and it also tends to reflect the disso-
nance felt between "women's experiences of identity and
men's paradigms for the human experience" (p. 184).

Now I am excited and writing furiously. Julia and
Virginia have given me a wealth of information to put
into my critique. There's only one more thing I want to
explore, with their help--feminist alternatives to mascu-
line constructions of objectivity, subjectivity, and
epistemology. I feel that my critique of the male writ-
ners would be much stronger if I offered feminist alterna-
tives for practice.

An Alternative Recipe

We have moved away from my computer and are now
sitting comfortably on my livingroom floor. I do have
one couch in my apartment, but Virginia and Julia chose
to sit on the floor. I think the quantities of wine they
are consuming have a lot to do with it. The conversation
at this point is very animated and very loud.

Virginia offers a humorous segue into my discussion
of feminist alternatives. She claims that the story
comes from Ferguson (1993), whom we have already dis-
cussed. She gives a short history of patriarchy and claims that in the late Middle Ages, men asked the question: "Are women human" (p. 36)? At this point, Virginia is struggling to hold in her laughter. Apparently, Julia is also familiar with this quote, because she too can barely keep a straight face. Virginia continues, saying that Ferguson contends that in reference to contemporary questions of subjectivity, feminists may legitimately ask: "Are men human" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 36)? Julia and Virginia begin laughing uncontrollably. Being infected by the humorous contagion, I also begin to laugh. When we finally gain control of ourselves, Julia goes on, in a serious tone, to expand upon Ferguson's second question (1993):

A better way to engage the man question with regard to subjectivity might be to ask, What kinds of subjectivity, what vision of what it means to be a person, characterize the patriarchal world? What have men made out of personhood? (p. 37)

And as we discussed earlier, men have equated maleness with humanness--women have historically been excluded from personhood.

Julia and Virginia want me to understand why we clearly need an alternative feminist perspective, in general and also in new literary forms, and not just a revision of the existing framework (Showalter, 1982):
So long as we look to androcentric models for our most basic principles, even if we revise them by adding the feminist frame of reference, we are learning nothing new. And when the process is so one-sided, when male critics boast of their ignorance of feminist criticism, it is disheartening to find feminist critics still anxious for approval from the "white fathers" who will not listen or reply. (p. 13)

I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment. They also say that it is crucial to understand that "feminism is, first and last, a political movement concerned with practical issues" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 2). They tell me I need to "recognize that values, politics, and knowledge are intrinsically connected" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 3). I thank them for helping me understand these points, as I believe they will help inform my thesis and my own life.

Julia takes a brief but informative aside, and tells me that some of her friends do not seek to place gender as the "primary axis of oppression" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 3), as I seem to do:

We find a strong consensus among feminists today that both the term and the project of feminism itself must be more inclusive than a focus on gender alone permits. If feminism is to liberate women, it must address virtually all forms of domination because women fill the ranks of every category of oppressed people. (p. 4)

Julia asks me what I think of this position. I tell her that I agree with being more inclusive in relation to
racial, age, ethnic and class issues. But I do not agree with replacing gender as the primary axis of oppression. It seems to me that perhaps Alcoff and Potter have it backwards—if women are contained in all ranks of oppressed people, and all oppressed people are not contained in the ranks of women, it seems to me that the category of gender must be primary. Virginia agrees with me, as does Julia.

I ask them what, in general, is the feminist answer to a plausible alternative to male writing? Julia, again, refers me to Ferguson (1993, p. 12), who writes, "Most feminist arguments for a women's perspective, voice, or standpoint call upon some version of an ontology of discovery and an epistemology of attunement." She then goes on to identify two very popular feminist perspectives—the interpretive approach, and the genealogical approach.

Ferguson defines the interpretive approach as a perspective that believes there is some inherent order in the world that "can be discovered or at least approached by human knowing" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 10). On the other hand, as we can see in the work of Luce Irigaray, for example, "much of contemporary French feminist theory is heavily influenced by the genealogical project" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 12). This is defined as a "counter-
ontology" that "denies there is any order out there to be discovered" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 10). I can see that postmodernism is beginning to creep into our discussion again.

Some would say that this opposition between the interpretive and the genealogical approaches undermines the realization of a feminist alternative in practice, much as some see the contemporary fragmentation of sociology as a disciplinary weakness. However, sister Sandra Harding, for one, welcomes this tension between ontology and counter-ontology--she "embraces the partiality and open-endedness that accompany an anti-totalizing project" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 12). Harding claims that it is no surprise that feminist epistemologies are somewhat unstable at this point in history--"we will have a feminist science fully coherent with its epistemological strategies only when we have a feminist society" (quoted in Ferguson, 1993, p. 13). I agree with Harding. Why can't we take the best from the interpretive and the best from the genealogical approaches and synthesize a plausible alternative?

I ask Julia and Virginia to expand a bit more on the interpretive versus the genealogical approach they introduced to me. Perhaps they could provide the basis for my own argument for feminist alternative epistemologies in
my thesis. Julia explains that the interpretive approach tends to be a "subject-centered" search for "truth," (Ferguson, 1993, p. 14) while the genealogical position problematizes the notion of subjectivity (Ferguson, 1993, p. 14). In this reading of the two perspectives, I tend to agree with the genealogical position, though initially I shied away from it because of its biological essentialism. Perhaps each of these perspectives has something to offer my critique of new literary forms. At any rate, both the interpretive and the genealogical approaches reject the traditional, positivistic Truth, which "rests upon accuracy of correspondence between the name and the thing" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 17).

Julia, Virginia and I then broaden our discussion and look at general feminist alternatives to the Western, patriarchal construction of the subject. One strategy is for feminists to demand women be allowed equal entry into "the world of the human as the dominant discourse defines it" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 58). But this is not really an alternative--it is merely a cry for inclusion (Ferguson, 1993, p. 58). Sandra Harding calls this "equity feminism" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 59). Julia, Virginia and I all decide to reject this alternative.

Ferguson posits that an alternative construction of subjectivity would include a notion of praxis or libera-
tion for women--the betterment of real life situations for women (1993, p. 60). I very much agree with her on this point. Again, Ferguson turns to discussions of the interpretive and the genealogical philosophies for answers. Interpretive would use women's marginality to our advantage (Ferguson, 1993, p. 60). In this position, as articulated by Iris Young, women's oppression is defined as (quoted in Ferguson, 1993)

the devaluation and repression of women's experience by a masculinist culture that exalts violence and individualism. It argues for superiority of values embodied in traditionally female experience, and rejects the values embodied in traditionally male dominated institutions. (p. 61)

One can define "women's experiences" in many ways: reproductively, politically, biologically, spiritually, etc. (Ferguson, 1993, p. 61). Ferguson introduces "praxis feminism" and claims that "[t]his alternative notion of subjectivity focuses on persons-in-relations" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 61). On the other hand, genealogical philosophy seeks to explode the binary opposition--i.e., male versus female--that underlies both patriarchal and gynocentric or interpretive constructs of subjectivity (Ferguson, 1993, p. 61). Both praxis feminism and genealogical philosophy appeal to me on this point.

There are pros and cons to both the interpretive and the genealogical approaches. I am wary of essentialist
feminism, and it seems that the roots of the genealogical approach (as exemplified very strongly by Luce Irigaray) are no doubt essentialist. But it seems to me, at the same time, that the orientation of interpretive subjectivity is not quite as potentially revolutionary as the genealogical position.

At any rate, it seems to me that perhaps a combination of these two would be a good start in formulating a true alternative to positivistic constructions of objectivity and subjectivity. I envision a feminist stew—one filled with the elements that will constitute a viable alternative to that offered by the male new literary forms writers. I take my yellow legal pad and begin writing down what I call my Recipe for Feminist Alternatives:

1 cup standpoint epistemology (whole); 1 pound of women's experiences (raw and uncooked); 2 cups self-referential reflexivity; 1 package of diversity (the multi-racial brand) for color and flavor; 1 cup dialectical objectivity (make sure all of the absolute objectivity has been carefully strained out); 3 cups situated knowledges; 2 cups partial perspectives (the non-privileged variety); 1/2 cup of essentialism (the revolutionary brand, only); 1/2 cup each of the genealogical and the interpretive approaches; omit the equity feminism and the meat. Stir together in a large kettle and wait for it to boil.

Julia and Virginia copied down my new recipe and promised me they would take it back into their feminist circle and try it out.
CHAPTER IV

EPILOGUE

Reflections: March, 1995

I recently attended the 9th Annual Midwest Feminist Conference in Toledo, Ohio. The theme was "Speaking Allowed/Aloud." I learned a lot from my feminist sisters. They taught me that we need to work in small ways to bring about feminist change--we need to focus on praxis. So on the long drive back from Toledo to Kalamazoo, I did just that.

Handbook Revised, Alternatives Employed

My butt hurts from all of the sitting I have done this weekend. And now, to top it all off, I must sit in this car and drive all the way home to Kalamazoo. The woman next to me in the car--a colleague with whom I presented my paper at the conference--was fast asleep. This gives me a chance to ponder what I learned from the women at the conference. I am thinking specifically about praxis.

I think of the Ashmore et al. (1995) article, the one that proved to be an exemplar of male new literary
forms writing. The article that was an important catalyst for my thesis. I am intrigued by and enjoy new literary forms, both reading them and writing them. So, how should have Ashmore et al. (1995) have written their article? First of all, I think the woman should have a name. Without one, she is not given an identity nor a voice--she is confined to speaking through her male authors. Her speech is neither allowed nor aloud.

Ashmore and his buddies should have refrained from stereotyping their female character. Though I depict the character in my thesis doing specifically "feminine" things--e.g., watching her weight, taking baths, and being afraid to go out alone at night--Ginny's behavior was grounded in the reality of Jennifer Boyers' experiences. Because I am a woman writing about a woman, I believe that I am not stereotyping in the sense that three men writing about a young woman are. They have no direct knowledge of what it is like to be a young woman working on her thesis, while I do.

Perhaps the Ashmore et al. (1995) article would have been more effective and less offensive if they would have used a male character, or even a group of male characters. It's funny--as I think about all of the stories I've read in my lifetime, I can barely recall any written by a woman that have a man or men as her subject(s). Yet
how many movies, books, television shows are written and/or directed by men that have women as the subjects? The experiential element is crucial, in my opinion, to writing more honestly.

Jo stirs beside me but does not awaken from her slumber. I try not to look directly into the lights of the oncoming cars in the lane beside me; my night vision is bad enough already. Sometimes I become mesmerized by those yellow lights. I am suddenly reminded of that horrible dream in which I was speeding down the Information Superhighway in a vehicle that was not controlled by me.

I shudder and think of Julia and Virginia. Are they with me now? I did see them momentarily at one of the conference sessions dealing with metaphors of food and lesbian sexual appetites in the work of Butler and Bordo. But they did not speak to me directly. I am thankful for all of the guidance they have provided me with, especially in terms of the feminist critique of new literary forms.

A joyful feeling overcomes me. I went searching for my sisters and I found them. I look at my hands on the steering wheel and think to myself, there are no men or masculine hands controlling this car. I smile. My smile quickly fades. I remember the recipe I created in my
apartment with Julia and Virginia. Will it ever be published in a cookbook? Can it ever truly come to a boil? Will women ever taste the richness of the stew? I continue pondering these questions, as I continue driving through the night.
1 I really hate to do "scientific" documentation with the citations. I also find it to be a very masculine style of writing. But, my advisor says I have to put these in to satisfy Western Michigan University's (indeed all academic institutions' and publications') guideline requirements. I decided to place these citations in the endnotes section because this long list is really quite boring, plus it is messing up the form of my narrative.


2 I resign myself to including references in the text. I'm sure you can see the need for me to use the endnote here, as I could not very well have scientific references floating around in Ginny's kitchen.

I use McDonald's here as a symbol of the "McDonaldization" process, or as Ritzer calls it, a "paradigm case" (1993, p. 1). He defines the larger process of McDonaldization as: The process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the
world (1993, p. 1). Ritzer contends that most all aspects of life are affected by this McDonaldization process, (interestingly enough, even sex) (1993, p. 8).

3 Of course the Brits hated to include the United States, because it is common knowledge they think all Americans are stupid!

4 Self-referring footnotes! A good example of this is the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), in which one can find references of herself. I can’t wait until I can reference myself in an article, and then go look up my own reference to myself in the SSCI, as I’m sure many writers do.

5 Pinch and Pinch is none other than Trevor Pinch and Trevor Pinch. In an extremely clever way, Pinch is employing the new literary forms technique of "second voice intervention," in which an argument is began in one voice and is also simultaneously critiqued by a second voice. In this case, both voices belong to Trevor Pinch.

6 McDonald’s included, of course.

7 Though I consider myself to be well-versed in grammatical issues and the English language, I had to look up the word dialethia (Webster’s II: New riverside university dictionary, 1984). I could not find it. However, I did find the word lethe, which is defined as: "The river of forgetfulness in Hades; loss of memory" (p. 687). I
also looked up the root dia: "Through or across" (p. 372). Both are of Greek origin. So, I deduce that this term means something to the effect of bridging or overcoming forgetfulness or a loss of memory.

8 This is a perfect example of paradox and irony in new literary forms writing. Because he uses the aforementioned new literary forms device of second voice intervention, Pinch is arguing with himself.

9 As you may or may not have guessed, Ginny Wolf is really Jennifer Boyers. Most of Ginny's experiences are my experiences. Ginny's world is my world. For example, I really do live alone, eat meat-flavored vegetarian burgers, have a great grandmother named Julia Miller Smith who kept extensive journals, I really have her desk, and I really do have a "hope chest" given to me by my grandmother for high school graduation. This is all part of my feminist critique. Ginny is a real character -- she is me. This is self-referential reflexivity. The nameless woman constructed by Ashmore, Myers, and Potter (1995) is not real.

10 I was confused with the terminology SSK and ST&S, so I asked my advisor for some clarification. (A young and impressionable female student going to her older, more distinguished, male mentor for guidance!) He tells me that SSK is part of ST&S.
Of course I had to slip in this reference to my advisor’s book, as it’s only the politically correct thing to do. Besides, as I mentioned before, I am attempting to write this thesis from my own personal experiences (me meaning Jennifer Sue Boyers), and I really did get Linden’s book (1993) from my advisor.

Ironically, the dust cover of Markle’s book contains a quote taken from Linden, commenting on Markle’s work.

I also had to look up this word in Webster’s. Though specularity was not found, a variation of the word proved to be very interesting. Specular is defined as: "Of, resembling, or produced by a mirror or speculum" (p. 1116). Because this word was used (or perhaps created) by essentialist Luce Irigaray, I would not be surprised if she intentionally sought to make the connection between patriarchal reflexivity, mirrors, and women’s bodies.
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